

Frequently Asked Questions - Parks-and-Soils Sales Tax

fact sheet

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What is the parks-and-soils sales tax?

The parks-and-soils sales tax is a statewide one-tenth-of-one percent sales tax that provides funding for Missouri state parks and historic sites and soil and water conservation. The tax is divided equally between the two efforts. Missouri voters first approved the tax in 1984 and have since renewed it twice. The tax is set to expire November 2008 unless renewed.

Why is there a sunset clause on the amendment?

By putting a sunset clause on the tax, it gives the public more opportunity for input on what they feel is important to the state park system and soils program. The clause helps keep the system and program accountable, and also allows for adjustments that may need to be made to ensure the programs are operated efficiently and effectively.

What will happen if the amendment does not pass?

Currently three-fourths of the state park system's budget and almost the entire Soil and Water Conservation Program's budget come from the parks-and-soils sales tax. If the tax is not renewed, an alternative source of funding would have to be identified. Both would have to compete with other programs for General Revenue funding, or drastic operational changes would need to occur to continue to conserve and manage Missouri's state parks and soil and water resources.

Why can't you use proceeds from the one-eighth-of-one-percent sales tax?

The one-eighth percent sales tax is a different tax approved by voters for the management of Missouri's fish, forestry and wildlife. These funds, administered by the Missouri Department of Conservation, are limited to those purposes and cannot be used for state parks and soil and water conservation, which are administered by the Department of Natural Resources.

The Soils Side

How has the soils portion of the tax money been used?

Money from the sales tax has gone toward several programs that help conserve Missouri's soil and water resources by giving agricultural landowners incentives to put conservation practices on the land. It has provided funding and assistance for more than 70 watershed projects and has helped many landowners install conservation practices, processing over 150,000 claims. Missouri has decreased its erosion rates by half since the passage of the sales tax, saving more than 148 million tons of soil.

How will the money be used if the amendment is approved?

The program will continue to work to conserve Missouri's soil and water resources for future generations. It will continue to provide assistance to landowners, as it works to decrease soil erosion to tolerable levels, decrease agricultural nonpoint source pollution, and promote total resource management.

What soil and water conservation programs are offered?

The **Cost-Share Program** reimburses landowners up to 75 percent of the cost for the installation of soil conservation practices that prevent or control excessive erosion. Landowners can also apply to receive a refund for a portion of interest paid on conservation equipment and practices through the **Loan Interest-Share Program**. The **Agricultural Nonpoint Source Special Area Land Treatment Program (AgNPS SALT)** focuses on reducing nonpoint source pollution in watersheds. Each of the 114 soil and water conservation districts in Missouri receives a district grant to hire personnel, fund technical assistance, and provide educational and information programs. There is also a soil science section that continually works on the Soil Survey and provides technical assistance to landowners.

Why is there money in the soils sales tax fund that has not been spent?

Every dollar in the soils sales tax fund, as well as projected revenue from the sales tax through fiscal year 2008, has been planned by the commission to support annual and long-term projects through 2013. Because the parks-and-soils sales tax is almost the entire source of funding for the Soil and Water Conservation Program, the commission has responsibly planned for the future, reserving funds to phase out programs in case the sales tax is not renewed. The majority of this money will be used to successfully complete several five to seven-year AgNPS SALT projects already approved. After 2005, no new AgNPS SALT projects will be approved for funding unless the sales tax is renewed.

Can I have a say in how the money is used?

The Soil and Water Districts Commission holds meetings, usually eight times a year, that are open to the public. The commission consists of six farmers selected by the Governor and approved by the Missouri Senate. They determine the programs and policies for the Soil and Water Conservation Program in Missouri. Each of the 114 soil and water conservation districts also has a District Board of Supervisors, which includes four locally elected landowners and a member of the University Extension Service. The board decides what policies and programs will best benefit their district and helps the local landowners with their soil and water conservation efforts. The district board holds meetings open to the public at least once a month.

I don't own agricultural land. How does this benefit me?

Everyone in Missouri benefits from soil and water conservation. Conserving soil is necessary for keeping agricultural lands productive for future generations. A decrease in soil productivity could negatively impact the Missouri economy, which depends heavily on agriculture. Sediment is also the leading cause of water pollution in Missouri. The sediment, nutrients, pesticides and other chemicals that enter Missouri's waterways can add millions of dollars to water treatment costs in Missouri communities each year, increase chances of flooding, and harm valuable aquatic habitat and organisms. By focusing on agricultural land, we can have a greater impact and better conserve Missouri's soil and water resources.

Can the soil sales tax money be used for storm water problems?

Missouri's constitution states that this money can only be used to conserve the productive power of Missouri's agricultural land. By focusing our efforts on agricultural land, we can have a greater impact and can better conserve Missouri's soil and water resources. By using good conservation practices on agricultural land we can help prevent storm water problems in the watershed. Of the streams and lakes impaired in Missouri, agriculture has been linked to 35 percent of impaired stream miles and 15 percent of impaired lake acres, whereas urban run-off and construction contribute less than one percent.

For more information on the soils portion of the sales tax:

Contact Bill Wilson with the Missouri Department of Natural Resources' Soil and Water Conservation Program at (573) 751-4932 or Bill.Wilson@dnr.mo.gov.

The State Parks and Historic Sites Side

How has the money been used?

The majority of the money has been used to repair and improve the existing state parks and historic sites. Buildings, campgrounds, roads and other facilities have been repaired and a maintenance program established to ensure they stay in good shape. New facilities, such as campgrounds, picnic areas and playgrounds, have been built to better serve the public. Another major priority has been to provide quality service to the visitors. The vast majority of staff provides service directly to visitors.

How will the money be used if the amendment is approved?

The department's priority will continue to be to adequately maintain the existing state park system and to provide a quality service to our visitors.

Will I have a say in how the money is used?

All state parks and historic sites now hold annual informational meetings, which provide opportunities for public input. Comments also can be given directly to staff at the parks and sites at any time, be sent to the division main headquarters in Jefferson City, or can be made to the Missouri State Park Advisory Board, which advises the department on state park matters. A recent public survey on what people believe is missing in the state park system was available at the parks and sites and online. The state legislature must approve and authorize the spending of the sales tax money.

I don't have a state park near me and I rarely visit parks. How will it benefit me?

State parks play a major role in tourism, one of the state's largest industries. This in turn strengthens the state's economy, which benefits everyone. A study by the University of Missouri-Columbia for the department revealed that the state park system has a significant economic impact for the state. The study found that in 2002, visitors spent a total of \$410 million on trips to state parks and historic sites. When this amount is spent and re-spent in the economy, it brings the state park system's overall economic impact in the state to \$538 million. The study also showed that state park expenditures support 7,660 jobs and generate \$162 million in income.

What about payment of local taxes?

The state park system makes payments in lieu of taxes (PILT) for the first five years of ownership to counties in which state parks and historic sites are located. After that time, the economic activity generated by the new park or site should provide additional tax revenue for the county to offset the loss of payment in lieu of taxes.

Are the taxes used for land acquisitions?

Donations and partnerships have become a major emphasis for the state park system. Recent key acquisitions were either donated (Morris State Park and Clark's Hill/Norton State Historic Site) or acquired through donations and partnerships (Edward "Ted" and Pat Jones-Confluence Point State Park).

Some adjacent lands acquisitions may be made but no sales tax money is used for this purpose. The emphasis for land acquisitions will be to protect the state park system. Property located within or adjacent to existing parks and sites may be purchased if there is a willing seller.

Do local park systems take advantage of the parks and soils sales tax?

The parks-and-soils sales tax is a dedicated tax and can be used only for state parks and soil conservation efforts. However, legislation was passed enabling local cities and counties to pass taxes of their own to support local parks and/or efforts related to storm water control.

What kind of citizen support is there for the tax?

When this tax was renewed in 1988, 69 percent of voters approved the measure while 67 percent of voters approved the 1996 renewal. This is unprecedented for a sales tax. During several comprehensive studies conducted since 1995, users of state parks and historic sites indicated their ongoing satisfaction with the state park system. According to the 2000 survey conducted by the University of Missouri, almost 99 percent of the users surveyed were satisfied with their visit.

For more information on the parks portion of the sales tax:

Contact Sue Holst with the Missouri Department of Natural Resources' Division of State Parks at (573) 751-6510 or Sue.Holst@dnr.mo.gov.

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